ACCATTONE

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Sometimes you see something that confuses you thoroughly. The work Batara, an outdoors pavilion made of concrete, sand-cast walls by Dutch architect Anne Holtrop, is such a work. The concrete walls have a soft, slick inner side and a rough, knobbly outer skin. Batara is upon first inspection clearly not from this day and age. It is pre-Medieval, it is brutalistic, it looks carved from stone like a cave. You imagine it must be situated somewhere on the Anatolian plateau. But upon closer inspection, the work reveals itself as extremely contemporary (it couldn’t be more of this day and age if it was made from high tech materials) and to be standing on a grassy field amidst what are clearly European trees. The contemporaneity of Batara is the result of a complex web of collapsing references related to time, space and materials. This interpretative flexibility is part and parcel of the work of Holtrop and something he consciously aims to achieve. It is no wonder that the pavilion was realized in the context of a Dutch exhibition called (Re)Source, that dealt with the tension between the original or the source, and the manipulated. Generally speaking, we approve of the original and are skeptic about the manipulated. But in our current image culture (and scientific reality for that matter) it is almost impossible to differentiate between original and fake. The two positions often bleed into each other or stand in for one another. What was once clearly manipulated, say plastics, has now almost an authentic feeling to it given that materials have evolved so drastically over the last decades. Batara balances in a tantalizing and delicious way between original, source (evoking images of a cave or an old religious location), and something that has clearly been manipulated (from certain angles the pavilion even has a 3D-printed feel to it).

This balancing forces you to keep looking and makes for a work that is confusing in a positive sense, that seems to slip away from attempts at classifying it and that simply resists being pinned down. However heavy and solid Batara looks, its connotations and references are agile and footloose.

Maaike Lauwaert
As architects we work with material to construct our work. How we make things depends largely on the materials we produce for our constructions. How and in which sizes the wood is cut influences the way we make our window frames or a wooden floor, the steel profiles are at the base of our steel structures.

If we open books again at the source of the material and its production we could see the gestures we recognise in them as the start of a renewed approach. These gestures could redefine ways of making and constructing: what are the gestures that give shape to the environments we inhabit? What is the correlation between material and craft? What places of production do we see now, in the past and in the future?

Nowadays 3D printing is seen as one of the examples where the production of something is related to the place where and when it is needed. A shift that short-cuts material production and construction. Again, as it did in the past when houses were made out of mud on which the houses stood. Or temples were carved out of the mountains.


Barthes describes the essence of the work of Twombly through the material. His art consists in making things that are seen – not the things he is representing. Let me rephrase Barthes argument in a reverse order to end with the surface (the canvas or paper) the work is made on: "We might observe that these gestures, which aim to establish substance as a fact, are all related to 'dirtying'. A paradox: the fact, in its purity, is best defined by not being clean. Take an ordinary object: it is not its new, virgin state which best accounts for its essence, but its worn, lop-sided, soiled, somewhat forsaken condition: the truth of objects is best read in the cast-off. The truth of red is in the smear; the pencil's truth is in the wobbly line." What Barthes tells us, is that when we see the material smeared, clotted and scratched we see its real character. When we see a perfectly straight black line of the pencil or a square painted red, we see form and colour and we might understand what it represents. But when the paint is smeared over the surface with its different intensities of red and different thicknesses, that is when we start to see its real substance. And Barthes relates the gestures of Twombly with the surface it is brought onto: "No surface, wherever we consider it, is a virgin surface: everything is always, already, rough, discontinuous, unequal, set in motion by some accident: there is the texture of the paper, then the stains, the hatchings, the tracery of strokes."

Let me make a step to broaden the view on what material gesture might be also about. In 1970 Roger Caillois wrote a book with the title L'ÉCRITURE DES PIERRES (The Writing of Stones). In this book he shows a collection of the inside of agate, Jasper, and onyx stones. The remarkable thing in these stones is that we tend to see images in them. One of these stones suggests a view of a typical English landscape. Another, a bit more abstract, clearly still indicates a spatial angled structure. What fascinates me in these stones, is that we first of all see the material of the stone, and when we would be able to hold it in our hands we would feel its heaviness and we would touch its surface. Next to it, we see in the material of the stone an image of something else: a landscape, a spatial structure. Caillois writes: "Who knows whether this tumult of triangles inscribed in the stone, first brought about nature and then by art, does not contain one of the secret cyphers of the universe?" So what 'secret' message of the universe is found in the stone that Caillois shows us? We could say that the image is the gesture of the stone. What could we do with its gesture? Should we construct the space it indicates in the image of the stone with the stones?

Last year I saw three times a stone in the work DISRUPTION OF THE ANTICIPATED FUTURE of the Belgian artist Koosraad Dedobbeleer. I don't know what Dedobbeleer's specific intentions are with this work, but let me explain what I saw in it. The largest object is a facetted form. It looks like an abstract natural form – in my view it looks like a stone. Seeing it as a stone is strengthened by the surface of it, which is made with sheets of formica that again have the image of a stone. Dedobbeleer might have made this constructed stone in formica and thought it could not stand straight up or not in the way he wanted it to stand up. And for the support he needed, he used two real stones. So what 'secret' message of the universe is found in the stone that Dedobbeleer shows us? We could say that the image is the gesture of the stone. What could we do with its gesture? Should we construct the space it indicates in the image of the stone with the stones?
CONTRIBUTORS

Jaro Straub is a visual artist living in Berlin. He studied fine arts in Berlin and Vienna (1996-2001) and was a visiting artist at the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, Los Angeles (2002-2003). His recent collage work involves a layering of information, merging found images, painting, texts, photographs and books into dense “sound” structures.

O’Point Associates. Since 2007, architect Nicolas Beullekens and technical draftsman Christian Chaidron put together their experiences to establish an innovative, bilateral approach to building measurement and data processing. In their work they aim to create documents that can immediately be exploited by different collaborators, such as architects, engineers, public and private clients.

Simon Boudvin (1979) is an artist and a teacher at the École Spéciale d’Architecture, Paris. His work revolves around the disruptions and the wastes of the everyday built environment, which he approaches with a scrupulous scientific interest and a varied plastic language, ranging between photography, technical drawing, sculpture and archival recollection.

Anne Holtrop (1977, The Netherlands) is an independent architect based in Amsterdam. His work ranges from models to temporary spaces and buildings, on which he occasionally collaborates with the artists Krijn de Koning and Bas Princen. He is course director of the master Studio for Immediate Spaces at the Sandberg Instituut Amsterdam, and was editor of OA’s, an architectural journal for architecture from 2005 until 2013. For his practice he has been awarded several grants from the Fonds BKVB, as well as receiving the Charlotte Kohler Prize for Architecture from the Prince Bernhard Cultural Foundation.

Bas Princen (1975) is an artist and photographer living and working in Rotterdam. He studied Design for Public Space at the Design Academy in Eindhoven, and Architecture at the Berlage Institute in Rotterdam. In 2010 he won the Silver Lion, together with Office KGDVS, at the Venice Bienale.

Maaie Lauwaert writes on contemporary art for various magazines and blogs and works as visual arts curator at Stroom, an independent centre for art and architecture in the Netherlands. Before starting at Stroom, she worked at the Mondriaan Foundation and completed a PhD. in cultural studies at the University of Maastricht. Her work has been published in De Witte Raaf, A Prior, Metropolis M, Kaleidoscope, Modern Painters and Art Agenda, among others.

architecten de vylder vinck taillieu – aDVVT– is the name under which Jan De Vylder, Inge Vinck and Jo Taillieu share their mutual appreciation, interest and previous realized work. Already long before each one of them, sometimes in collaboration with each other, steadily developed and realized a certain variety of projects. Since 2009 it is clear that the establishment of aDVVT has given wings to the united view on what architecture can possibly stand for.

Robbrecht en Daem architecten was founded in 1975 by Paul Robbrecht (1950) and Hilde Daem (1950). In 2002, Johannes Robbrecht joined the practice and became partner in 2012. The office has won numerous prizes and distinctions and has been exhibited internationally. One of their work’s distinctive feature is a constant relation between their architectural designs and the visual or performing arts, whether in their designs for stage theatres, music halls as much as in their designs for scientific or technical facilities. After their participation in 1985 and 1991, the office was invited for the 13th Venice Architecture Biennale, “Common Ground”, curated by David Chipperfield. Their Market Hall and central squares of the historical centre of Ghent was selected as finalis for the Mies van der Rohe Award 2013.

Christiane Lange holds a masters degree in art history and history from University of Bonn. As a member of the German Research Foundation – Project “Catalogue Raisonné of furniture and furniture design by Mies van der Rohe” – she catalogs all furniture designs, realised and unrealised, by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. The Project is led by Wolf Tegelhoff of the Zentralinstitut fuer Kunstgeschichte, Munich, Germany. Christiane is a founding member of “Projekt MIK e. V.” in Krefeld, Germany. Her research, exhibitions and movies focus on the European work of Mies van der Rohe and Lilly Reich. In 2013 she curated the exhibition “MIES 1:1 The Golf Club Project” with Robbrecht en Daem as artistic directors.

Sandro Della Noce (1982) has studied Art History at Paris-Sorbonne and has attended the School of Fine Arts of Marseille, his home town. Graduated in 2008, he was granted a permanent residency at the Ateliers de la Ville de Marseille. In 2011 he was awarded the Art-O-Rama prize at the International Art Fair of Marseille. Since 2012 he lives and works in Brussels.

Guillaume Gattier (1982) trained as a carpenter before entering almost by chance the School of Fine Arts of his home town. Unwilling to achieve anything, he quit school after obtaining a scholarship which brought him to New York in 2007, then in Berlin (2008) Since 2009 he has been living and working in Marseille.

Gilles Pourrier (1980) has studied Modern Literature. He was then trained as a glass-maker at the European Research and Training Glass Centre in Nancy (CERFAV), which brought him to work for four years in London. Graduated from the School of Photography of Arles (ENSAP) in 2009, he lives and works in Marseille.

Cyrille Lefebvre (1987) graduated from Paris-Malaquais School of Architecture in 2011. She has worked for several offices, and volunteered for several international building sites, notably in Nepal. Today she is creating a collective for participative architecture in Paris.

Oscar Tuazon (1975, Tacoma, Washington) lives and works in Los Angeles. He studied at the Cooper Union School of Art and attended the Whitney Independent Study Program in New York, before working for artist Vito Acconci in his architecture studio. Until 2007, he was based in Paris where he co-founded the collective-run artists’ gallery castillo/correas. In 2011, he designed one of the four para-pavilions at the 54th Venice Biennial. Comprised of a combination of natural and industrial materials, the sculptures and installations of Oscar Tuazon reference minimalism sensibilities, extreme do-it-yourself aesthetics and vernacular architecture.

Sara Cremer & Carlo Gonçalves (1982-1980) graduated from La Cambre in Brussels and Paris Malaquais (2009 and 2007). They are now Paris-Brussels based architects and teachers at ULB Faculty of Architecture La Cambre Horta. They have just started to draw together. Their drawings and collages reflect future territories in their physical and imaginary forms.

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